

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7579

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUCHAREST 2235

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR EFIN EAID SENV RO US
SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF RIUL MARE HYDRO PROJECT

REF: 75 BUCHAREST 6309

1. WE UNDERSTAND THAT IBRD BOARD OF GOVERNORS HAS MET OR WILL MEET SHORTLY TO CONSIDER THE RIULMARE PROJECT (REFTEL).
 2. PROJECT RAISES (AT LEAST IN OUR MINDS) SOME IMPORTANT AND CONFLICTING ISSUES OF POLITICAL POLICY, PROCEDURE, AND ETHICS IN ADDITION TO USUAL IBRD ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS.
 3. PROJECT APPROVAL WOULD BE FULLY IN ACCORD WITH U S POLICY TO SUPPORT ROMANIAN INDEPENDENCE AND ECONOMIC VIABILITY THROUGH FINANCING BY INTERNATIONAL LENDING INSTITUTIONS. WE CONCUR IN DEPARTMENT'S PRACTICE OF BACKING IBRD-STAFF-APPROVED PROJECTS WHEN ROMANIAN ACCESS TO BANK CREDITS IS INVOLVED, AS GENERAL RULE.
 4. HOWEVER, THE ENVIRONMENTAL-IMPACT STUDY ON WHICH BANK'S APPROVAL MUST BE CONDITIONED IN THIS CASE IS APPARENTLY FRAUDULENT AND CONTRIVED. WE SAY "APPARENTLY" BECAUSE REFTTEL REQUEST IN DECEMBER FOR TEXT OF IMPACT STATEMENT FAILED TO OBTAIN IT. BASED ON PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS BY EMBOFFS AT SITE PLUS CONVERSATIONS WITH LOCAL INHABITANTS
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AND OFFICIALS AS WELL AS HEAD OF ROMANIA'S CHIEF "PRIVATE"

ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATION, IMPACT OF RIUL MARE PROJECT WILL BE TO DESTROY WHAT IS PERHAPS ROMANIA'S LAST RELATIVELY UNDEVELOPED SCENIC RIVER AND IMPINGE HARMFULLY INTO THE HERETOFORE SACROSANCT (UNDER BOTH NON-COMMUNIST AND COMMUNIST ROMANIAN GOVERNMENTS) SCIENTIFIC RESERVE SANCTUARY AT THE HEART OF RETEZAT NATIONAL PARK. BY "DESTROY," WE MEAN LITERALLY TURNING THE ONCE-WILD RIUL MARE INTO A DITCH OR PUDDLE AND DIVERTING THE WATER INTO A GREAT PIPE, PLUS SCARRING THE FORESTED VALLEY AND SURROUNDING MOUNTAIN AREA WITH CONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES.

5. ONE CENTRAL ISSUE HERE IS PROCEDURAL. IF THE IBRD IS COMMITTED TO AT LEAST CONSIDERING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT, IS IT PREPARED TO ACCEPT A "SNOW-JOB" FROM ROMANIAN OR OTHER AGENCIES WITH VESTED-INTEREST IN IGNORING OR MINIMIZING IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE? ISSUE INVOLVES CORRUPTION OF DUE PROCESS, IT SEEMS TO US, AND WE URGE THE DEPARTMENT TO MAKE THIS POINT FORCEFULLY TO ALL AGENCIES AND PARTIES INVOLVED, LOOKING TOWARD FUTURE CASES.

6. EMBASSY ALSO FEELS A SEARCHING LOOK SHOULD BE TAKEN AT WHETHER ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT IS BEING ADEQUATELY WEIGHTED AMONG THOSE FACTORS WHICH CONDITION IBRD APPROVAL OF SPROJECT FINANCING. IBRD HAS IMMENSE LEVERAGE IN INSISTING ON GENUINE (NOT FAKE) IMPACT STATEMENTS, REVIEW BY INDEPENDENT, ENVIRONMENTAL-PROTECTION ATTUNED EXPERTS, AND CORRECTION OF DEFICIENCIES IN PLANS OR INDEED CANCELLATION OF MIS-BEGOTTEN PROJECTS.

7. ANOTHER ISSUE IS WHETHER BANK AND DEPARTMENT HAVE BROUGHT TO BEAR ADEQUATE EXPERTISE, IN USG OR OUTSIDE, ON ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR IN CLEARANCE PROCESS OF PROJECTS. IF LACK OF STAFF IS PROBLEM, CONSULTANTS MIGHT BE RETAINED. MOREOVER, REJECTION OF SKETCHY, INCONSISTENT, OR OBVIOUSLY MISLEADING IMPACT STATEMENTS DOES NOT REQUIRE GREAT EXPERTISE.

8. A LAST CONSIDERATION IS OPENNESS-THE DEGREE TO WHICH WIDER, EVEN PUBLIC, EXPERT AND LAY ATTENTION MIGHT BE FOCUSED ON PROJECTS IN ORDER THAT RESPECTIVE GOVERNMENTS HEED PRESENT-DAY ENVIRONMENTAL NORMS. THIS IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT WHEN AUTHORITARIAN DEVELOPING REGIMES WITH "INDUSTRIALIZATION-AT-ANY-COST" ETHNIC ARE INVOLVED.
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THE MOST GLARING BLUNDER IN THIS REGARD WAS THE ASWAN DAM (OF COURSE NOT INVOLVING IBRD), AN ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE WHICH IBRD MIGHT WELL HEED.
BARNES

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